

Choosing the Right Medication to Treat Your Flu

When you take a trip down the pharmacy aisle in the grocery store, you might notice that most OTC medications are aimed at treating the [cold or flu](#). With about 7 in 10 Americans turning to over-the-counter solutions during flu season, it is no surprise that there is an abundance of these medications available, and they all claim to be the most effective choices for flu symptoms. Unfortunately, you can't rely on advertising to lead you to the right medication, so you might follow these guidelines for treating the flu instead.

Treat only the symptoms you have

Many [cold and flu medications](#) treat a wide range of symptoms, but you may not need this shotgun approach to flu treatment. If, for example, you only have a runny nose and a headache, you might choose to take an OTC pain reliever and use a decongestant nasal spray instead of reaching for cold medicine, which may also contain cough suppressants and alcohol that you don't need. Alternatively, you might assume that cold medication will treat all of your symptoms when only some are covered on the label.

Always follow recommended doses

When you're sick, you might have some fuzzy logic and think that doubling a dose of medication can help you get better twice as fast. Unfortunately, that is simply not how any medications work, and taking too much at once could be problematic, since so many flu medicines contain Tylenol, or acetaminophen. In high doses, liver damage or even death can occur from this common pain reliever. Giving medication to kids is an area where acetaminophen overdose is particularly common, since multiple parents or caregivers might administer medication throughout the day.

Know the side effects

Drowsiness is a characteristic side effect of flu medications, so you will want to be particularly careful when selecting a medication you can take before work or school. Make sure that you read up on possible side effects of any medication and the drug interactions that can be particularly dangerous.

Use holistic treatments too

Sometimes, medicine is not exactly the best medicine. Cold and flu medications might not accelerate healing times, so you may turn to [holistic therapies](#) if you have more time to rest at home. A hot cup of tea can soothe a sore throat and keep you hydrated, while a humidifier might make it a little easier for you to breathe. If you are battling a runny nose, you can find relief by breathing in steam from a container of hot water with a towel or cloth draped over your head.

If you identify [flu symptoms](#) early on, you might also benefit from prescription anti-viral medications that can get you back on your feet faster. (For example, taking Tamiflu within 48 hours of flu symptoms first appearing can reduce the amount of time you are sick.) And - if you're just too busy to be call out sick - [Walmart Health Virtual Care](#) can help you seek care for the flu fast, from the comfort of your home or office, with on-demand doctor's visits.